

**FROM: GAIL MCKIBBIN**  
**DATE: 27 FEBRUARY 2001**

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**DOUGIE TOPPING**

**PROGRAMME FOR GOVERNMENT: BRIEFING**

1. Katrina Godfrey's briefing requests of 13 and 21 February refer. I apologise for the late reply.
2. A series of lines to take on topical issues which are the responsibility of the Executive Secretariat are attached as follows:
  - Annex A - Postponement of BIC and NSMC plenary meetings
  - Annex B - Nomination Issues – NSMC and BIC
  - Annex C - Liaison with the Civic Forum
3. Lines to take provided at Annexes A and B may need to be updated in light of any decision about the NSMC plenary which is scheduled to be held on 2 March 2001.
4. Katrina's note of 13 February requested lines to take on each of the actions listed in the PfG under each director's responsibility. The NSMC Secretariat will provide briefing on the North/South issues as listed in 6.2 (with the exception of those actions which were provided by DOE). However I have attached at Annex D briefing on the Irish Lights Commission as mentioned in para 5 of section 6.2 which should be associated with the briefing provided by the NSMC Secretariat.
5. Finally, I have attached at Annex E lines to take covering 4 of the 5 actions listed under section 6.4 (the action regarding the availability of Irish Language TV is the responsibility of DCAL)
6. If you have any queries regarding the lines to take please do not hesitate to contact me.

**GAIL MCKIBBIN**  
**EXT 22514**

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**Mr McCusker  
Mrs Flanagan  
Mr Wheeler  
Mrs Birch**

## ANNEX A

### POSTPONEMENT OF BIC [AND NSMC] PLENARY MEETINGS

#### **British Irish Council**

The second plenary meeting of the British Irish Council which was planned for October last and was cancelled due to the funeral of Donald Dewar.

The planned plenary meetings which were scheduled for 23 January 2001 and 5 February 2001 were postponed because the British and Irish Governments decided that since many of the politicians and officials who would have been involved in the British-Irish Council were involved in the ongoing political talks at the time, it made sense for the BIC plenary meeting to be postponed to allow the focus to be maintained on resolving the outstanding issues and try to move the process forward.

#### **[North-South Ministerial Council if postponed**

The plenary meeting scheduled for 2 March was postponed because.....]

**NOMINATION ISSUES– NSMC and BIC**

***NSMC***

- It is not appropriate to comment on the question of NSMC nominations in view of the current appeal against the published judgement on the Judicial Review proceedings brought by the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and the Minister of Education.

***BIC***

- In accordance with the provisions of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, it is for the First Minister and Deputy First Minister acting jointly to make such nominations of Ministers and Junior Ministers as they consider necessary to ensure cross-community participation in the British Irish Council.

**NSMC NOMINATION – JUDICIAL REVIEW**

- There is public interest in having precision in relation to the law on various matters and it is important for everyone to know exactly what the law is on this issue.

- As the proceedings relate to the discharge of Ministerial functions it is accordingly appropriate that each Minister's Department should meet the legal costs. Information on the costs of the proceedings is not yet available.

## ANNEX C

### LIAISON WITH THE CIVIC FORUM

- Following consultation with the Civic Forum, arrangements for obtaining views from the Civic Forum on social, economic and cultural matters were approved by the Assembly on 6 February 2001.
- Arrangements are as follows:-

The Civic Forum shall offer its views on such social, economic and cultural matters as are from time to time agreed between the Chairperson of the Forum and the First Minister and Deputy First Minister.

In addition, the Civic Forum shall be invited to offer its views on specific social, economic and cultural matters where the Assembly has by motion so requested.

- Under the Belfast Agreement and the NI Act 1998 the [Deputy] First Minister and I are responsible for providing administrative support for the Civic Forum. Subject to resource considerations neither the [Deputy] First Minister nor I have any intention of preventing the Forum from addressing any issue it wishes to address. However, it is for the Civic Forum itself to develop their own operational policies and any operational issues should be referred to the Civic Forum Secretariat or Chris Gibson the Chair of the Civic Forum.

## ANNEX D

### Section 6.2 – North/South

**Irish Lights Commission** –(to be associated with briefing provided by the NSMC Secretariat)

- Functions relating to the provision of aids to navigation along the coast of the island of Ireland have not yet been transferred to the Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission. The transfer requires primary legislation at Westminster and new financial arrangements to be put in place. Work at official level is ongoing.

**SECTION 6.4 – East/West**

**British-Irish Council**

***Sectoral meetings***

- The administrations are progressing work programmes on the topics which were agreed at the first summit meeting on 17 December 1999 for discussion at future sectoral meetings.
- Officials from OFMDFM and other relevant departments continue to play a full role in progressing the work programmes being taken forward by each administration.

***Summary of work by administrations***

- Two Ministerial sectoral meeting; one on environment and one on transport (on which we were in the lead) have been held. Work at official level is continuing on drugs, social inclusion and knowledge economy.

**Summary of progress made by each administration**

***Environment (British Government)***

- A Ministerial meeting took place on 2 October 2000 which agreed an initial programme of work, including waste management, climate change and radio active waste from Sellafield.

#### ***Drugs (Irish Government)***

- A report by the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, setting out the current position on the implementation of the Northern Ireland Drugs Strategy and the proposals for taking forward co-operation on drugs issue within the context of the British Irish Council was circulated to the Executive on 17 January 2001.
- Reduction of drug misuse is one of the specific actions listed in the Programme for Government.

#### ***Knowledge Economy (Jersey)***

- Officials from OFMDFM and DETI attended a meeting of officials held in November 2000 when a wide-ranging discussion was held. At this meeting Jersey agreed to take the lead in developing the British Irish Council's website. A further meeting of officials to discuss the issue of the digital divide and progress on the website is scheduled for the end of March 2001.

#### ***Social Inclusion (Scotland and Wales)***

- Officials from OFMDFM attended a meeting of officials held in November 2000 to discuss proposals in this area. Proposals include a new 'community inclusion network', aimed at helping communities

learn from each other supported by a BIC website and a community summit proposed to coincide with a future British Irish Council meeting.

### **Transport Sectoral**

- Transport sectoral meetings for [both the North-South Ministerial Council and] the British Irish Council, in which the [Deputy] First Minister and I took the lead, was held at the end of last year.
- The meeting of the British Irish Council agreed that the Northern Ireland Executive would convene a meeting of senior officials to examine options and prepare detailed recommendations for a number of initial priority areas which will include exchanges of information and experience, particularly in relation to public and private partnerships, including the consideration of a possible mechanism to facilitate such exchanges, as well as also address regional air links and the potential for co-operation on road safety and integrated transport.
- The launch of a Road Safety strategy is a specific action listed in the Programme for Government.

### **DUP ISSUES**

- The DUP Ministers have already indicated a willingness to take part in genuine co-operative relationships with other jurisdictions and it is

hoped that this willingness will extend to taking forward work in relation to the [North-South Ministerial Council and] British-Irish Council. The Deputy First Minister and I have asked the Minister for Regional Development to confirm that he will permit his officials to play a full part in taking forward the proposed work programmes of the [North-South Ministerial Council] and British-Irish Council. A reply has not yet been received

## **BRITISH-IRISH INTERGOVERNMENTAL CONFERENCE**

- The date of the next meeting has not yet been set.
- If at future meetings there are discussions on non-devolved matters which relate to Northern Ireland the [Deputy] First Minister and I will be present and will give a report to the Assembly on those discussions.
- In the absence of any meetings of the British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference which are organised by the British and Irish Governments, the [Deputy] First Minister and I have made a number of representations to Treasury and have written to the Chancellor to voice our concern about the effects of the high level of fuel tax.